

A winter weekend in Epsom for a Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta* (L.)(Lep.: Nymphalidae)

About 13.00 hours on 19 February 2000, I spent some minutes in the garden here in Epsom watching a Red Admiral flying about a bush of Japanese Apricot *Prunus mume* in full bloom, settling on the blossom and feeding (one could see it using its proboscis). The bush was in full sunshine, but the air temperature round the bush was only 9°C. An immediately adjacent Rosebud Cherry tree *Prunus subhirtella* in full blossom and a bush of the *Lonicera fragrantissima*, also in full blossom a short distance away, were totally ignored. The butterfly itself was quite undamaged.

About the same time on the next day, the butterfly (I can only presume it was the same individual), repeated its performance. The sun was shining, but again the air temperature was only 9°C. The overnight minimum in the garden from 19-20 February was 0°C and there was a sharp ground frost.

On the following day, 21 February, the butterfly was present yet again, settling on the blossom and feeding or, at times, just sunning itself. It was seen first at 11.05 hours and was still flying around at 12.30 hours. The air temperature at the time was 11°C, which was the maximum temperature recorded in the garden during the period 18-22 February.

Sightings of *V. atalanta* in Britain in the first few months of the year are not infrequent. Current thinking (Tucker, 1997. *The Red Admiral Butterfly*. British Butterfly Conservation Society) is that the species over-winters here in a state of quiescence rather than in a state of true hibernation, becoming active whenever the temperature permits. The presence, however, of apparently the same specimen flying in the same garden on three consecutive days in February is, as far as I can determine, unusual.

I thank Howard Mendel for drawing my attention to Tucker's report.— J. A. OWEN, 8 Kingsdown Road, Epsom, Surrey KT17 3PU (E-mail: jaowen@talk21.com).

Smaller Heath on the Great Orme

On 29 May, whilst in Llandudno, Caernarvonshire, I took the opportunity to visit rough grassland on the Great Orme, where I caught and released a number of male Small Heath butterflies *Coenonympha pamphilus* L.. These all measured 24 mm in wing span. In Emmet & Heath (1990. *Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland*. 7(1): 277), the male wingspan is given as approximately 33 mm., although the male illustrated on Plate 18 (figure 8) measures only 30 mm. So, these Great Orme specimens could perhaps represent a dwarf race.

Having read long ago of the dwarf races of the Grayling butterfly *Hipparchia semele* and the Silver-studded Blue *Plebejus argus*, then recently discovered in North Wales, I wonder if there is a possibility that other species also appear there in dwarf form.—R. J. R. LEVETT, 28 The Drive, Tonbridge, Kent TN9 2LP.